

## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Committee on Foreign Relations is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing on nominations.

## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Committee on Foreign Relations is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing.

## COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

The Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

## COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing.

## COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

The Committee on the Judiciary is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

## SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

The Select Committee on Intelligence is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a closed briefing.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—  
H.R. 1868

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 1868, an act to prevent across-the-board direct spending cuts, which was received from the House and is at the desk.

I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, the Democrats have just passed a \$1.9 trillion spending package. They filled the bill with lots of partisan priorities. They refused to work with Members on this side of the aisle. Almost all of what we are doing here—have done there is going on a credit card. That is going to have to be paid for by our children and their children.

Democrats also ignored the Medicare sequester as part of that \$1.9 trillion bill. As a doctor, I have cared for patients in Wyoming for more than two decades. I cannot ignore this decision.

There are more cuts to healthcare providers serving seniors. That is what these have done. They go into effect starting April 1. They are coming.

Congress must help those working on the frontlines fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be our highest priority. Ignoring cuts to Medicare while spending \$1.9 trillion on other things, to me, is irresponsible.

Instead, just a few days after their partisan spending bill was signed into law, here we have the chairman of the Budget Committee back asking for additional money.

Now, he knows the right thing to do is to help these Medicare providers on the frontlines, and I want to do exactly the same thing. Once again, instead of working on a bipartisan basis, Senate Democrats are rushing through another partisan spending package.

There is a better way. Senator COTTON and I have introduced the Protecting Seniors Access to Healthcare Act. Our legislation takes a small amount of the money from State and local governments as part of that \$1.9 trillion bill. Instead of billions going to Gavin Newsom and instead of billions going to Andrew Cuomo, our legislation gives a small fraction of that money to help our healthcare providers around the country. Instead of a blank check, our bill gets the money to where it is needed the most: to healthcare providers on the frontlines of this pandemic.

Our bill also includes commonsense provisions to ensure that taxpayer money is not given to illegal immigrants or prisoners. Our bill simply says that if you are here illegally, you don't get the payments in the Democratic spending bill.

Senator COTTON and I know we can't hand out American taxpayer dollars to illegal immigrants. That is why our border is being flooded right now—because President Biden offers benefits for illegal immigrants. We also shouldn't be cutting checks to people sitting in jail.

The question is whether Washington Democrats are interested in solving problems or just playing politics. I think we can provide much needed relief for Medicare providers, and we should. It is completely irresponsible for the Democrats and the administration to spend \$1.9 trillion and fail to help the healthcare providers who are working to serve Medicare patients.

Therefore, Mr. President, I ask that the Senator modify his request to instead take up H.R. 1868 with my substitute amendment at the desk and ask unanimous consent that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator from Vermont so modify his request?

Mr. SANDERS. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Is there an objection to the original request by the Senator from Vermont?

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I understand we are not in a quorum call.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Correct.

## DEFENSE BUDGET

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I am down here today to talk about something that I have talked about many times before, and that is the need to have a strong defense budget so we can deter our adversaries.

You know, it is not like it used to be in the old days. It is for real. These guys—China, for example, is in a position they have never been in before. I think it is important that we talk about this budget that is coming up again. It is more important now than ever.

Over the past few weeks, the Senate Armed Services Committee has been having hearings in which we have heard from top military leaders, defense experts, and Pentagon officials. What we have heard has been grim.

LTC H.R. McMaster told us that since the 1990s, China has undertaken the "largest peacetime military buildup in history."

Admiral Davidson, who leads the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said, "I think our conventional deterrent is actually eroding in the region."

Last week, Admiral Faller, who leads the U.S. Southern Command, said, "Now more than ever, I feel a sense of urgency about global threats we face in our neighborhood."

Now, I agree. I thought the Cold War was bad, but the threats we are facing now, especially from China, are more complex and more dangerous than they ever have been before. In fact, I look back sometimes wistfully at the days of the Cold War when things were predictable. We had two superpowers. We knew what they had; they knew what we had. Mutual assured destruction meant something. It really doesn't anymore. Times have changed. I agree that the Cold War was bad, but it is worse today.

I am glad to hear President Biden and members of his administration say that China is our top pacing threat. Both Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks told the Armed Services Committee during their nomination hearings that was the situation.

What concerns me is, I haven't seen the Biden administration take any action that backs up these words. Instead, we are hearing rumors that the Biden administration is considering a flat defense budget, which is actually a 2-percent cut when you adjust for inflation. At the same time, China is increasing theirs by 6.8 percent.

It kind of reminds me of the last 5 years of the Obama-Biden administration. That would have been from 2010 to 2015. During that 5-year period, the budget for the military was reduced by 25 percent. At the same time that it

was reduced by 25 percent, China was increasing theirs by 83 percent. This was happening out in the real world. People are not aware of this.

This sort of thing tells me that the administration isn't serious about pushing back on China. And do you know what? It also tells China the same thing. So talk is cheap, but defending our country is not.

If we really want to send the right signal to Beijing—a signal that says you can't ever win against us—we need sustained investment in our defense.

We have seen what happens when we cut defense spending before. Look no further than the Obama administration's 25 percent cut over 5 years. If we had just increased defense spending with the rate of inflation over the past decade, we could have invested another \$400 billion in modernizing our military—money we wouldn't have to spend today. Instead, we are playing catchup with China, which added at least \$200 billion that we know of—we never know for sure with China—to its defense budget over the same time period. Chinese military modernization has been nothing short of astonishing. Their ability to move fast and increase production rates is leaving us back in the dust.

We have invested heavily in the advanced capabilities we know we need, like hypersonic weapons, biotechnology, and quantum computing.

We are already spreading our military too thin. Our servicemembers have been asked to do too much with too little for too long.

But we know how we can put our military on a better track. We have a blueprint—the 2018 National Defense Strategy. This strategy actually has been very effective. It was put together back in 2018 by six Democrats and six Republicans, and they all had expertise in the area, where it has not been questioned. So we actually have a document here that shows us what we can do.

If we had increased—the Chinese military modernization has been nothing short of astounding. Their ability to move fast and increase production rates is leaving us in the dust.

Here we have something that we can follow, and it has been successful so far. We have all agreed that this is what we should be doing, but we have not been doing it successfully. We know the strategy is right when it comes to priorities and the long-term nature of this competition. Secretary Austin and Secretary Hicks said as much in our committee hearings.

So why are they talking about adding more missions, including the Department's role in climate change and pandemic response and not countering China?

So we know what the strategy needs to be, and that tells us what the demands on our force look like. Those demands keep growing. Now we need to mesh the budget with the strategy. We know what it looks like, and that is at

least a 3- to 5-percent real growth above inflation.

Now, that is what was determined some time ago, in 2018, and that is what we really need to be doing, but we are not doing it. And yet we know what should be done.

So, you know, this is a new administration, and I am going to do all I can. I have already met with the President, with the administration. I know that they are concerned, but we are going to have to get down and actually get it done. It means, in real dollars, an increase of at least \$75 to \$125 billion each year. Now, that would be if we stuck with the 3- to 5-percent increase that is predicted as being necessary in this book. This kind of investment for 5 years in a row would completely close the difference between U.S. and Chinese defense spending.

And what does the investment get us? It allows us to keep our commitment to our servicemembers to not only take care of them and their families but also to give them the tools and training to do their jobs.

You know, often, we hear about the fact that we are spending too much on the military. We talk about that we spend more on the military than both China and Russia put together. But there is a reason for that. The most expensive line that we have in our military is taking care of the troops, their families. You know, in the communist countries, they don't have to do that. They give them the guns; they go out and kill people. They don't have to spend the money that we do. But we do it, and we do it right. But we need to continue to increase so we can get dug out of the hole that we have dug over decades of insufficient funding and overuse of the force. The bills have been piling up for years. This is a down payment to get the U.S. military healthy for decades of strategic competition.

Now, I am hesitant to even entertain this idea, but I think it is important to talk about it. I know that there are some out there who would like to see the President go even further and cut defense spending by 10 percent. This is wrong, and Congress has already flat rejected it on a bipartisan basis last year. In the Senate it was defeated by 77 to 23. Even in the Democrat-led House, it was defeated on a 3-to-1 margin.

Now, take it from the President's own Deputy Secretary of Defense, Kath Hicks, who wrote that a 10-percent cut would turn the United States into a regional power, increase nuclear proliferation, and weaken our allies. This is completely opposite of everything President Biden says he wants to do. It would preemptively surrender the 21st century to the Chinese Communist Party.

A strong defense budget is the first step. It underpins all of our efforts when it comes to diplomacy, the economy, and technology.

Is China going to slow its military investments any time soon? No, it is

not. In fact, we know their actual level of spending is a lot larger than it looks. Economics, yes, but the Chinese Communist Party also lies about its military budget—no surprise. We know that they lied about COVID-19, and they continue to lie about their human rights atrocities against the Uighurs.

So if we don't properly resource our military and put our right forces in the right place at the right time with the right staff, we are going to fall further behind.

So it is kind of early right now, and this is the time, though, that we need to be talking about it immediately to be preparing for the future.

The bipartisan 2018 NDS Commission report already said the U.S. military could very well lose the next state-on-state war it fights.

We need the Biden administration to lead here—to walk the walk and not just talk the talk when it comes to China. And if the Biden team won't lead, I will make sure that we use our role in Congress to send the message.

It is not just Beijing that needs to see that we are serious, but our allies and our partners need to see this as well.

The best signal we can send is a strong defense budget topline. This can't simply wait any longer. This is common sense, and this is something, I think, that we will, on a bipartisan basis, recognize that we need to do and prepare for immediately. That is what we intend to do, and that is what is expected of us at this time.

With that, I will yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

(Mr. HICKENLOOPER assumed the Chair.)

Mr. KING. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. KING. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, following morning business, on Wednesday, March 24, the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of Calendar No. 40, Rachel Levine, to be an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Calendar No. 38, David Turk, to be Deputy Secretary of Energy en bloc; further, that at 11:30 a.m., the Senate vote on cloture on Calendar Nos. 40 and 38, in that order; further, that if cloture is invoked on either of these nominations, all postcloture time be considered expired at 4:45 p.m. and the Senate vote on confirmation of the nominations in the order upon which cloture was invoked; further, that if either nomination is confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.